

Message Text

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SUBJ: UNIVERSITY RADICALISM DECLINES IN MILAN

1. SUMMARY. MILAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, 15 PERCENT OF THOSE IN ITALY, HAVE GROWN QUIETER OF LATE. THAT DOESN'T MEAN SMALL GROUP OF RADICAL AND SOMETIMES VIOLENT LEFTIST ACTIVISTS HAS DISAPPEARED. BUT THEY ARE MORE CONCERNED TODAY WITH WEAKENING SOCIETY AS WHOLE THAN WITH PROTESTING SCHOOL CONDITIONS. AND THEY HAVE LOST SUPPORT OF COMMUNISTS THAT WAS SO IMPORTANT IN GETTING THEM LAUNCHED DECADE AGO. CATHOLICS, MEANWHILE, ARE AGAIN MAKING THEIR PRESENCE FELT IN UNIVERSITIES. ALTHOUGH UNIVERSITIES ARE BY NOW IN STATE CLOSE TO CHAOS, THESE CHANGES ARE SIGNS OF HOPE THAT FUTURE MAY BRING RECOVERY FOR ITALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION. END SUMMARY.

2. WE HAVE SPOKEN OVER RECENT WEEKS WITH RECTORS, PROFESSORS, STUDENT LEADERS AND OTHERS IN MILAN UNIVERSITY SCENE'S CAST OF CHARACTERS. ALTHOUGH OUR SAMPLE PERHAPS TOO SMALL TO ALLOW DEFINITIVE CONCLUSIONS, OUR FINDINGS INDICATE THAT IMPORTANT CHANGES ARE TAKING PLACE THAT BODE WELL FOR ITALIAN HIGHER LEARNING EVEN THOUGH PROCESS WILL TAKE TIME. FINDINGS ARE PRESENTED IN DETAIL IN AIRGRAM TO FOLLOW.

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3. MILAN'S UNIVERSITY POPULATION IS ABOUT 115,000 OR 15 PERCENT OF ITALIAN TOTAL. OF THESE, WE ESTIMATE THAT 5,000 (FOUR PERCENT) BELONG TO RADICAL LEFT OR "THE MOVEMENT" AND THAT ANOTHER 5,000 ARE SYMPATHIZERS. MOVEMENT, WHICH COUNTS PLENTY OF NON-STUDENT PARTICIPANTS AS WELL, IS FRACTURED INTO ALMOST ONE HUNDRED GROUPS, SOME WITH ONLY HANDFUL OF MEMBERS. MOST IMPORTANT ARE DEMOCRAZIA PROLETARIA (DP-WHICH ELECTED SIX DEPUTIES IN 1976 INCLUDING THREE

FROM LOMBARDY), AVANGUARDIA OPERAIA (WITH RIGID INTERNAL STRUCTURE BUT PREDOMINANTLY NON-VIOLENT), AUTONOMIA OPERAIA (COALITION OF SMALLER GROUPS WHO SERVE AS APOLOGISTS FOR LEFTIST TERRORISTS), AND LOTTA CONTINUA (MILITANT GROUPS WITH WELL-KNOWN NEWSPAPER OF SAME NAME).

4. INFAMOUS RED BRIGADES (BR), PRACTITIONERS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ESTABLISHMENT FIGURES WHO HAVE BECOME - LIKE BAADER-MEINHOF - SYNONYMOUS WITH TERRORISM, IS COMPOSED ALMOST ENTIRELY OF NON-STUDENTS WITH MINIMAL FOLLOWING IN UNIVERSITIES. STUDENTS SAID TO BE TURNED OFF BY BR VIOLENCE. SOME OF OUR CONTACTS, HOWEVER, THINK BR HAS SMALL CLANDESTINE FOLLOWING AMONG MILAN STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY AT MAMMOTH (65,000) MILAN STATE UNIVERSITY.

5. THESE GROUPS AND OTHERS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO DRASTIC DETERIORATION OF MILAN UNIVERSITIES. SINCE 1969, WHEN REFORM LAW OPENED UNIVERSITIES TO PRACTICALLY EVERYONE, ADMISSIONS HAVE BALLOONED AND STANDARDS FALLEN GREATLY. WHILE 1968 STUDENT PROTESTERS CAME FROM CLOSED (I.E., UPPER MIDDLE CLASS DOMINATED) UNIVERSITIES, TODAY'S RADICALS COME FROM UNEDUCATED BACKGROUND AND ATTEND SCHOOLS THAT ARE WIDE OPEN BUT WITH RESOURCES FAR INFERIOR TO EXPLOSION OF STUDENT BODY.

6. IT IS NOT SURPRISING, THEREFORE, THAT TODAY'S STUDENT EXTREMISTS, IN CONTRAST TO IDEALISTIC OPTIMISTS OF "CLASS OF '68", ARE CYNICAL, CALLOUS, PESSIMISTIC, AND NOT VERY WELL PREPARED ACADEMICALLY. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MEASURE OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO GENERATIONS IS FACT THAT NUMBER OF MILAN'S PRESENT YOUNG COMMUNIST (FGCI) AND CATHOLIC COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE LEADERS ARE FORMER 1968 ACTIVISTS. IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE CURRENT ULTRA-LEFT LEADERS TEN YEARS HENCE ASSUMING SIMILARLY RESPONSIBLE ROLES IN ITALIAN SOCIETY.

7. ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, PRESENT-AND ACTIVE-AT CREATION OF RADICAL STUDENT MOVEMENT IN 1968, TODAY VIEWS RADICALS WITH HOSTILITY. MILAN FGCI SECRETARY TOLD US PARTY WAS DELIGHTED AT POOR SHOWING OF DEMOCRAZIA PROLETARIA IN LAST DECEMBER'S HIGH SCHOOL ELECTIONS AND RELATIVELY UNCONCERNED, ON OTHER HAND, THAT CATHOLICS HAD DONE WELL. YOUNG COMMUNIST LEADERS HERE NOW BELIEVE THAT RADICAL INFLUENCE WITHIN UNIVERSITIES HAS PEAKED THOUGH THIS IS CONCLUSION NOT SHARED BY CATHOLIC MOVIMENTO POPOLARE LEADER RESPONSIBLE FOR MILAN UNIVERSITIES. BOTH MOVIMENTO POPOLARE AND COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY ACTIVE IN UNIVERSITIES IN RECENT MONTHS, PART OF MORE GENERAL CATHOLIC POLITICAL RE-AWAKENING NOTICEABLE ELSEWHERE AS WELL.

8. ALTHOUGH IT IS HARD TO TELL WHETHER ULTRA-LEFT INFLUENCE IN MILAN UNIVERSITIES HAS CRESTED OR NOT, PRESENT STUDENT TRANQUILITY COMPARED WITH PREVIOUS PERIODS IS UNMISTAKABLE. (THIS IS NOT TRUE

OF MILAN HIGH SCHOOLS, HOWEVER, WHERE DISRUPTIVE AND OFTEN VIOLENT
EXTREMIST MINORITY IS KEEPING SOME SCHOOLS IN CONSTANT STATE OF
TENSION.) STUDENT DISTURBANCES OVER PAST TWO YEARS, FOR EXAMPLE,
HAVE BEEN DECIDEDLY FEWER THAN IN ROME, AND NOT FOR LONG TIME HAS
MILAN SEEN STUDENT-INITIATED VIOLENCE LIKE THAT WHICH OCCURRED IN
BOLOGNA IN 1977. AT MOMENT, MOREOVER, NEITHER FALL OF ANDREOTTI GOV-
ERNMENT, CANCELLATION OF UNIVERSITY ELECTIONS OR FERMENT WITHIN UNION
S
HAS BROUGHT MILAN STUDENTS INTO STREETS. THAT, PLUS LONGER-TERM
TENDENCIES OBSERVED ABOVE, IS GOOD NEWS FOR HEALTH OF UNIVERSITIES.
EVEN THOUGH CONTINUED ABSENCE OF OVERALL REFORM LEGISLATION AND
DEARTH OF OPERATING FUNDS MAKE DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENTS UNLIKELY IN
SHORT TERM, SCHOOLS MAY AT LEAST BE WITNESSING RETURN TO ORDER. AND
THAT IS PRE-CONDITION TO ANY SERIOUS REFORM.
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9. IN SUM, RADICAL LEFT GROUPS ARE EXPENDING MUCH LESS OF THEIR
ENERGIES WITHIN UNIVERSITIES THAN DID 1968 COUNTERPARTS AND AS
CONSEQUENCE UNIVERSITIES, WHILE DETERIORATING, ARE QUIETER. REA-
SONS ARE PCI SOBERNESS, CATHOLIC REVIVAL, STUDENT REJECTION OF RADI-
CAL VIOLENCE, AND GENERAL RECOGNITION THAT UNIVERSITIES HAVE REACHED
STATE OF CHAOS. THEY ARE ALL SIGNS OF HOPE THAT FORCES WHICH HAVE
BROUGHT ITALIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM TO NEAR RUIN MAY BE ON WANE.
FINA

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